

Message Text

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43

ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1309

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 6572

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: AFSP, SY, AEMR

SUBJECT: BEIRUT EXPRESS

REF: (A) DAMASCUS 4710, (B) BEIRUT 6498, (C) BEIRUT 6517, (D) BEIRUT 6529

1. IN VIEW OF RECENT EXCHANGE OF TELEGRAMS CONCERNING RADIOS AND BEIRUT EXPRESS DRIVERS HELD BY LAA, EMBASSY BELIEVES IT WORTHWHILE TO SHARE WITH DEPARTMENT ITS OBSERVATIONS RE THE ROLE BEIRUT EXPRESS PLAYS VIS A VIS OUR OFFICIAL PRESENCE HERE.

BEIRUT EXPRESS, A FREIGHT AND STORAGE COMPANY FOUNDED IN 1960 HAS ITS HEADQUARTERS IN BEIRUT AND SUB-OFFICES OR CONTRACTUAL ARRANGEMENTS THROUGHOUT THE MIDDLE EAST, EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES, IT'S PRESIDENT, FRED SEIKALY, IS AN AMERICAN CITIZEN, OF PALESTINIAN ORIGIN.

2. DURING THE 1960'S AND EARLY 1970'S EMBASSY BEIRUT HAD CONTRACTED FOR THE PACKING AND STORAGE SERVICES OF SEVERAL FIRMS INCLUDING BEIRUT

EXPRESS. SINCE THE OUTBREAK OF HOSTILITIES IN APRIL 1975, THE AVAILABILITY OF SUCH SERVICES DECLINED UNTIL BEIRUT EXPRESS REMAINED AS THE ONLY SOURCE OF PACKING/FORWARDING SERVICES IN BEIRUT. THE FIRM FINDS ITSELF IN A SOLE SOURCE POSTURE AND, UNDERSTANDABLY, TAKES ADVANTAGE OF THAT FACT..

AS A RESULT OF CIVIL CONFLICT IN LEBANON, THE SCOPE OF SERVICES OFFERED BY BEIRUT EXPRESS BROADENED AND THE NATURE OF THESE EXPANDED SERVICES BECAME INCREASINGLY
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UNORTHODOX. THE FIRM HAS NUMEROUS CONTACTS AMONG

THE SEVERAL ACTIONS THAT MAKE UP LEBANON'S HUMAN DRAMA. THESE CONTACTS, MANY OF WHICH THE EMBASSY WOULD BE UNABLE TO INITIATE, HAVE PERMITTED BEIRUT EXPRESS USING BRIBES, PAYOFFS AND MUSCLE TO PROVIDE THE MISSION WITH VARIED AND VITAL SERVICES, AMONG THEM:

- A) ARMED EXCORT FOR EMBASSY PERSONNEL BETWEEN EMBASSY AND AIRPORT, WHEN OPEN;
 - B) TRANSPORT OF SUPPLIES, "A" POUCHES, APO MAIL, AND EQUIPMENT BETWEEN AIRPORT AND EMBASSY AND BETWEEN DAMASCUS AND BEIRUT, AS NECESSARY;
 - C) PACKING OF HHE AND PERSONAL EFFECTS IN HOSTILE AREAS OF BEIRUT AND TRUCKING SAME TO AIRPORT (WHEN OPEN), DAMASCUS AND AMMAN;
 - D) LOCATING AND PROCURING BLACK MARKET GASOLINE FOR THE EMBASSY WHEN IT IS OTHERWISE UNOBTAINABLE;
 - E) CLEARING USG PROPERTY THROUGH ROADBLOCKS - PROPERTY WHICH WOULD OTHERWISE HAVE BEEN CONFISCATED;
 - F) ARRANGING FOR THE RETURN OF EMBASSY TRUCKS AND AND HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE AND APPLIANCES WHICH HAD BEEN STOLEN;
 - G) PROVIDING LEASED BUSES AND TAXIS FOR EVACUATION OF PERSONNEL.
- NOT SURPRISINGLY, THE BEIRUT EXPRESS STAFF PROFILE REFLECTS THE AMBIENCE IN WHICH IT DOES BUSINESS. FIRM EMPLOYS GREEK ORTHODOX CATHOLICS, MARONITE CHRISTIANS, MOSLEMS, PROFESSIONAL FREIGHT FORWARDERS AND ARMED THUGS.

4. IN SUMMARY, WHILE THE FIRM CAN AND DOES ERR (WITNESS SEIZED RADIOS), IT HAS BEEN A NORMALLY RELIABLE OUTFIT PROVIDING SERVICES TO THIS EMBASSY WHICH ARE INDISPENSABLE AND UNOBTAINABLE FROM ANY OTHER SOURCE. SEELYE

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